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ABSTRACT

The future role of the social sciences in educational administration theory is explored in this paper. First, the turn toward the social sciences in educational administration is considered. Attacks by the subjectivist and critical theorists on positivistic science are examined next, with attention to the decline of those two views in sociology and other disciplines. Finally, the situation in educational administration is explored. Although empirical work remains a substantial force, subjectivist, neo-Marxist, and pragmatic theories have engendered trends toward field studies and theoretical and methodological eclecticism. A conclusion is that scholarship in educational administration would be well served to appreciate science as: (1) seeking plausible explanation and credible evidence; and (2) self-critical and self-corrective. A revitalized science, realistically understood in terms of strengths and limitations and the relationship to values and practice, could facilitate a period of renewal in educational administration. (61 references) (LMI)

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**Whither Educational Administration?
The Post Postpositivist Era**

by

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Since the 1950s, thought and research in educational administration have featured an emphasis on the social sciences, a critical reaction toward science that mirrored one within the social sciences, and now appears ready to enter a new stage. If the social sciences and especially sociology are bellwethers, that stage will probably be characterized by a variety of conceptual and methodological approaches, a decline in polemical writing, and standards for inquiry based on what has been a persistent practical empiricism among those who do research.

The turn to the social sciences in educational administration is considered first. Attacks by subjectivists and critical theorists on science are then examined, along with the decline of those two views in sociology and elsewhere. Finally, the situation in educational administration is explored and some recommendations are made.¹

Educational Administration and the Social Sciences

In the 1950s, educational administration as a field of study began to draw upon the social sciences as sources of concepts and theories. This broadened intellectual focus was only one aspect of a larger effort to improve and professionalize preparation programs and scholarship in the field. Some of the major participants were the Committee for the Advancement of School Administration of the American Association of School Administrators, the National Conference (now Council) of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) and, a little later, the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA). The Kellogg Foundation provided financial support for a variety of the activities.

There was strong support for change from these groups and from the leaders in the field at that time. The arguments favoring the use of the social sciences were quite compelling since school administrators accomplished their work through people in group, organizational, and community settings, the very settings that provided the subject matter for the social sciences. Ideally, the research and theory of the social

sciences could offer insights into current problems and also direct new inquiry in educational administration. Such thinking diffused rapidly, especially among the field's active scholars (see, e.g., Campbell, Fleming, Newell & Bennion, 1987; Culbertson, 1988).

Among the early influential works were the NCPEA sponsored book Administrative Behavior in Education (Campbell & Gregg, 1957) and Administrative Theory in Education (Halpin, 1958), a collection of papers from UCEA's first seminar for professors. Two journals oriented to theory and research were soon established, the Journal of Educational Administration at the University of New England in Australia and, under UCEA auspices in the U.S., Educational Administration Quarterly. All this led to a great deal of scholarship and research (see Boyan, 1988) and to increased specialization among professors of educational administration, often along lines that reflected the different social sciences (Willower, 1988).

A diversity of theories and methods, reflecting the numerous choices available within each of the social sciences, were employed. Leadership, organizational climates, social systems, roles, and power structures were all subjects of inquiry during the latter 1950s and 1960s and, in the 70s, garbage can and organized anarchy theory, the loose coupling concept, institutional theory, and frameworks from political economy entered the educational administration literature (Boyan, 1982; Boyd & Crowson, 1981). Although a few scholars such as Hills (1967, 1975, 1982) saw it as potentially valuable, functionalism never became a serious strand of substantive scholarship in educational administration, despite some recent claims to the contrary. Theories and methods typically were seen as research tools. In fact, much of the research in the field was conceptually eclectic using whatever theories or concepts that helped to shed light on the problem under consideration.

In short, the turn toward the social sciences in educational administration brought theoretical and methodological variety. In addition, the literature began to

reflect a tougher-mindedness that contrasted with the hortatory character of much previous writing. The turn toward the social sciences also fostered greater equality as reason and evidence were increasingly valued over pontification, whatever its source.

At the same time, the influence of social science scholarship was limited even during the period from the mid 1950s to the mid 70s. As a multifaceted field, educational administration had numerous interests, including practical ones. For instance, UCEA, an organization strongly oriented to scholarship (Campbell, et al., 1987), had perhaps as its chief thrust during this time, the development of more realistic teaching materials. Moreover, the move to broaden the field intellectually included concerns with philosophy and the humanities and there was steady, if not extensive, writing along these lines (see, e.g., Farquhar, 1970; Graff & Street, 1957; Ohm & Monahan, 1965; Willower, 1964).

Given the field's different interests and the variety of the intellectual scene, including the number and diversity of competing theories and methodologies, there was no dominating orthodoxy nor even a dominant theory or social science. Indeed, some writers such as Halpin and Hayes (1977) contended that the social sciences were never accepted at the grass roots within the educational administration professoriate. They argued that the influence of the social sciences was short lived, declining in the 1960s due to the resistance of practice-oriented professors.

Whether or not one accepts that argument, it seems clear that the two decades ending in the mid 70s were ones of great activity along a variety of lines and from a variety of perspectives. While most of the leaders in the field and especially those who were doing research were committed to social science applications, the research culture of education was never really strong and it was internally quite diverse. So it was not surprising that when the social sciences themselves began to change in directions that were critical of science, educational administration eventually was affected.

Changing Social Science

The spirit of the times in the 1960s and 70s was deeply influenced by the cold war with its potential for nuclear disaster, Vietnam, the Civil Rights Movement, and activism of all kinds. The universities were among the most affected, especially students and faculty in the social sciences and humanities. Economic and social conditions, government, technology, science, and more became objects of condemnation and protest.

All this led to much greater popularity in the social sciences (and the humanities) of two kinds of thinking that had long been part of the intellectual landscape, but more marginal than mainstream. One was neo-Marxist and the other was subjectivist and phenomenologically-oriented. Fitting the pessimism and disillusion with social institutions that marked the times, these perspectives drew numerous adherents. In sociology, for instance, they were, at least briefly, triumphant (Alexander, 1988).

Influences in Educational Administration

True to its relationship with the social sciences, educational administration was to undergo a similar sea change, although the transfer took some time. Subjectivism did not become a serious factor in its literature until the mid 1970s and neo-Marxism was even later. Although others had earlier suggested subjectivistic philosophies for educational administration (Hartley, 1970), Greenfield (e.g., 1975, 1986) was the most voluble and persistent advocate of that view. Neo-Marxism was presented mainly in its critical theory version. Foster (1980, 1986) was perhaps its most thoughtful exponent while Bates (1980, 1985) made a more polemical contribution.

In any case, the presentation of these two views in educational administration followed the positions traditionally taken by their respective proponents and used the same kinds of arguments previously made in the social sciences, but tailored to the new

field. The subjectivist view emphasized the importance of the individual and argued that traditional social science neglected the richness of personal experience and feelings in favor of an unattainable objectivity. The critical theorists stressed inequalities, especially those related to social class. They contended that economic power was used in society to maintain the prerogatives of the dominant class to the detriment of the less privileged ones.

While subjectivism and Marxism traditionally stood in fundamental opposition to one another as philosophies, they shared certain antipathies and this was reflected in writing in educational administration. Thus, proponents of both views attacked what they called positivistic science. Subjectivists asserted that science excluded values, emotions, and questions of right and wrong, which were central to the practice of administration. Critical theorists argued that science, like other social institutions, served class interests and they believed that criticism of societal arrangements that fostered inequality was their primary function as scholars. When critical theorists did empirical work, they favored qualitative styles of research. Subjectivists also touted this kind of inquiry which, in any event, was already well accepted in educational administration and quite widely used by field researchers who had no connection to critical theory or subjectivism or rejected both (Everhart, 1988; Willower, 1988).

Critical Reactions

A general problem with the two perspectives was that they were oriented mainly to criticism. What each was against was clearer than what it was for. To give an example, both views were critical of thought and practice in educational administration because they believed values were ignored. Greenfield (1986), for instance, contended that administrators, influenced by administrative science, thought of themselves as objective and rational, but emerged instead as dehumanized technocrats lacking genuine commitments to values. Both Bates (1980, 1985) and Foster (1980, 1986) averred

that administrators treated students and others differentially, favoring the well-to-do and powerful and remaining insensitive to emancipatory values such as equity.

However, Greenfield did not present a positive theory of values or evaluation, although he approvingly cited Hodgkinson's (see, e.g., 1991) hierarchical system of values that culminated in absolutistic principles. Critical theorists were equally or perhaps even more limited in advancing a value theory, despite the Marxist emphasis on praxis, a term borrowed from philosophy (where it meant thoughtful or informed practice) to refer to political action in behalf of the Marxian agenda. Critical theorists such as Giroux and McLaren (1987) recognized the failure of what they called "leftist educators" to go beyond critique and contended that what is needed is radicalized teachers with an emancipatory vision ready to struggle for social justice. But this is deficient if intended to be a position on values since it ignores the process of valuation and potential value conflicts.

The general criticisms of subjectivism and critical theory, like the arguments used by proponents, are more or less traditional ones in the social sciences. Subjectivism (and Greenfield in particular) have been faulted for attacks on a straw man, an archaic, mechanistic scientism that is without advocates, while ignoring the open, self-corrective processes of science and philosophies that reject positivism, but accept science. Additional criticisms are that subjectivist epistemology ends in relativism since it lacks standards for judging ideas, that subjectivism is left with a conception of values grounded in individual preferences, or if a system like Hodgkinson's is adopted, confusion over potentially competing principles.

Critical theory and other forms of neo-Marxism are often depicted as basically political ideology, rather than theory presented to be assessed and tested in inquiry. While highly critical of others, Marxian critical theorists are held to exempt their own views from empirical evaluation. The assumption of a monolithic ruling class has also been questioned, given the pluralistic politics and multiple interest groups of modern

society and it is charged that critical theorists ignore upward mobility and social justice in democratic nations and the history of oppression and privileged elites found in countries that have had Marxist regimes. In connection with schools, critical theory is seen as utopian, censorious, and out of touch with reality. More extensive treatments in educational administration of both views, their philosophical and social science origins, and criticisms can be found in Evers and Lakomski (1991) and Willower (1991) and sources they cite.

Conflict and Confusion

As my necessarily sketchy review makes clear, educational administration, like the social sciences, has been in a period in which conflict between competing perspectives was even more intense than usual. This period was marked by disputes which were sometimes acrimonious and which spawned a good deal of confusion as well. Griffiths (1979) described the situation succinctly in the title of one of his articles, "Intellectual Turmoil in Educational Administration."

Confrontation, intellectual and otherwise, commonly polarizes positions and encourages sweeping and frequently simplistic generalizations and criticisms. Unfortunately, educational administration was more vulnerable to such ploys than some fields because more than a few of its professors were not well prepared in the philosophical and social scientific issues that were in contention and others, oriented mainly to practice, believed these issues to be abstruse and irrelevant.

Words like positivism, phenomenology, functionalism, hermeneutics, and paradigm were quickly incorporated into the educational administration literature, where they were used frequently, if not always carefully or accurately. For instance, Greenfield (1975) initially used the term phenomenology in presenting his version of subjectivism, which bore only the faintest resemblances to philosophical phenomenology as founded and developed by Edmund Husserl. This was a small slip, however, compared

with the loose use of positivism to refer to virtually any quantitative inquiry or of functionalism to refer to any of the many systems-oriented theories. A few writers even lumped positivism and functionalism together, although as Martindale wrote, the latter was "a form of antipositivistic holism" (1965, p. 145).

At least some of the confusion in educational administration could be traced to writers in the social sciences or philosophy. To give just two examples, critical theorists and other neo-Marxists conflated positivism and other philosophies, enabling them to attack the more vulnerable positivist view and ignore more formidable alternatives. The faddish overuse of the term paradigm in the social sciences (and later educational administration) was another source of confusion. This occurred despite Masterman's (1970) analysis showing that Thomas Kuhn's history of the sciences gave paradigm 21 different meanings. Rhetorically, the term was sometimes employed to suggest an otherwise unsupported (paradigm) shift in the direction of the user's perspective and opposing paradigms were depicted as in crisis or collapse. Given the multiple meanings of the term, it often was unclear if the object of the claimed demise was a particular theory, a type of theory, an ideology, an underlying philosophy, or something else. In one of its broader senses, paradigm as world view, the term was used to link disparate views and dichotomize options.

The overall point is that intellectual discourse was short circuited as subtle distinctions were lost to deceptive classification that often served ideological purposes. Thus, while the debates in educational administration often were vigorous and exciting for participants, they were sometimes miseducative for the field at large. Furthermore, since fundamentally different views were being taken by the various protagonists, disagreements tended to be restated rather than resolved. Many perceived little progress resulting from the intellectual struggles that marked the period and were tired of the exaggeration and dogmatism of some of the antagonists.

The Decline of the Polemical

In sociology, where subjectivist and neo-Marxist views enjoyed prominence and even some dominance, they appear to have run their courses and begun to wane. Alexander (1988), for instance, indicated that these perspectives have lost their momentum and declined because of their one-sidedness. Radical, one-sided theories are losing out to theorizing he described as synthetical rather than polemical. Furthermore, as Smelser (1988a) makes clear, social scientists who do empirical research continue to adhere to a standard of scientific scholarship, even those who are critics of science. He observed that, because of this, attacks on sociological empiricism have not been very successful. In the end, rank and file social scientists have maintained an enduring commitment to practical empiricism in their research.

The same situation pertains in educational administration. Culbertson, for instance, asserted that the field's scholars "still look to science. . .for a legitimating cloak, facilitator of inquiry and as a tool" (1988, p. 24). Griffiths (1988) came to a similar conclusion in his review of the literature on administrative theory.

Whether trends in scholarship in educational administration will continue to reflect those of disciplines such as sociology as they have in the past is, of course, an open question. A prior issue, not further considered here, is the extent to which scholars such as Alexander correctly perceive emerging directions in their own field. Presumably, others will weigh in with different conclusions. Moreover, educational administration differs from the social scientific and humanistic disciplines because of its multiple interests. The practice of administration in education and the preparation of practitioners is a major focus in addition to theorizing and research. Its history as a field of study is not a long one and, as has been noted, its commitments to scholarship and research are not unequivocal.

Whither Educational Administration?

The whither question, once asked by Halpin and Croft (1963) in the narrower context of research on school climates, can be put in both predictive and normative terms. The first pursues the likely directions of scholarship in the field, the second the desirability of alternate directions.

Crosscurrents and Eddies

My depiction of trends in thought in educational administration sketched efforts in the 1950s and 60s and beyond to broaden the base of scholarship by drawing on the subject matter and methods of other disciplines, the attacks on scientific approaches made from the mid 1970s by subjectivists and critical theorists and the waning of those perspectives in a discipline educational administration typically reflects. Such accounts, of course, simplify reality. Even when general trends are discernible, crosscurrents and eddies are abundant and new ones enter to alter the flow.

The relevant theories and philosophies have not been homogeneous. Initial social science influences in educational administration featured numerous competing views from different disciplines and within those disciplines. Subjectivism, developed to a great extent in the writing of one person, did not draw on the variety of thought available in the social sciences and philosophy, some of which could enter educational administration more substantively. There is nothing in the field comparable to the work of Alfred Schutz (e.g., 1967) or Harold Garfinkel (1967) in the tradition of phenomenological sociology. Hermeneutics has been used mainly in what Rorty (1979) called its edifying sense rather than its epistemological one and the hermeneutical scholars who see their methods as complementing science rather than as an alternative to it (e.g., Richter, 1990) have been ignored. Phenomenological analysis as method has had only a few proponents (see Vandenberg, 1982). Such neglected regimens stand in

sharp contrast with the more vaporous views grouped under the labels of postmodernism and its close kin poststructuralism. Associated with writers like Derrida (1973), Foucault (1977), and Lyotard (1984), they emphasize indeterminacy, the distrust of reason, and the deconstruction of ideas. Popular in the humanities, they are beginning to be applied in organizational studies (Cooper & Burrell, 1988) and could become more salient in educational administration.

Neo-Marxist thought has historically spawned contending subschools based on disagreements over points of ideology. Complaints that one or another form of neo-Marxism is actually anti-Marxist are quite common (e.g., Lebowitz, 1988) and Wallerstein (1986) wrote of the "era of a thousand Marxisms" (p. 1302). The critical theory version of neo-Marxism favored in education has been traditionally attacked by other Marxists as being too concerned with abstract theory at the expense of praxis (Agger, 1983). In education, issues include whether to emphasize reproduction or resistance, how far to go to sound more mainstream, for example, by citing Dewey, if social class should continue to have priority over race and gender, and the place of ideology in research.

Students of gender, race and ethnicity have also developed lines of work that are concerned with equity and are reform oriented (Ortiz & Marshall, 1988; Richards, 1988; Valverde & Brown, 1988). However, they run the gamut from those who advocate critical theory to those who reject or oppose it. Scholarship on reform and change in education has a long history (see, e.g., Cremin, 1962). Today, the players are new, but many of the issues are not. Equity, for instance, has for sometime been a major concern of those who study school finance and law (Guthrie, 1988) and has been a major focus of the extensive attainment literature in the sociology of education (see Bidwell & Friedkin, 1988).

On the philosophical front, the main oppositional thrust to subjectivistic and neo-Marxist thinking in educational administration has been pragmatism (Willower,

1988). This view is anti-positivistic but oriented to science. Its epistemology, a weak point of both subjectivism and most forms of Marxism including critical theory, is well developed. Its approach to values stresses the empirical side of normative issues and is well suited to administrative problems (see Evers & Lakomski, 1991). However, whether this philosophy will become more widely accepted is an open question.

While the philosophical and ideological debates have been taking place, empirical work in educational administration has continued on its own course, only moderately affected. More field studies of various kinds is one trend (Everhart, 1988; Willower, 1988) and it is true that they are preferred by subjectivists and neo-Marxists who do research. However, these preferences represent one force among many since such work has been part of educational administration since the 1950s and is pursued by scholars of virtually all persuasions.

Various studies of the content of journals in educational administration conclude that empirical work remains a substantial component of the material published (see, e.g., Swafford, 1990). Much of this work is theoretically eclectic, on topics such as succession, leadership, organizational conflict and politics, school cultures, and work patterns and on particular positions ranging from the assistant principalship to the superintendency.

In short, while certain intellectual trends seem reasonably clear, the overall pattern is full of variations and exceptions and there is a noteworthy element of independence between philosophical discourse and empirical research. Next considered are some of the directions the field might take.

Directions: Some Conjectures

Obviously, no one can do more than make educated guesses about the future. Given the previous analysis, a primary question is whether subjectivism and neo-Marxism will wane in educational administration as they have in disciplines like sociology. A

reasonable conjecture is that educational administration will continue to mirror such disciplines, as it has since the late 1950s. However, the time lag can be considerable and the correspondence is quite imperfect. For instance, it appears that neither subjectivism nor neo-Marxism reached the levels of sophistication and influence in educational administration that they gained in the social sciences.

It is possible that subjectivism could be revitalized in educational administration by greater attention to methods like phenomenological analysis or hermeneutics as methods, but as noted earlier, much of what has been done has been oriented to edification or been superficial. For example, we have been treated to numerous dichotomized lists featuring a kind of catchall interpretivism versus an outdated positivism rather than to serious scholarship. In line with such trends, versions of postmodernism/poststructuralism could well become the next passing fad in the field since these views appeal mainly to emotion and ideology rather than reason.

At the same time, it is well to keep in mind that the methodological approaches found in subjectivism commonly involve reflection according to certain emphases or procedures. In the end, their cogency will depend on the extent to which their presentations are explicit and logically compelling.

On the research side, symbolic interactionism could carve out a respectable niche in educational administration. This perspective, however, apparently does not belong in the subjectivist camp. Although it leans in that direction, its chief forebear is G. H. Mead, a pragmatist philosopher, and as Smelser (1988b, p. 122) tells us, Blumer, perhaps its leading sociological proponent, appears to have rejected philosophical subjectivism.

Neo-Marxian critical theory could be headed for some sort of metamorphosis. The collapse of Marxism as a basis for governance, spurred by popular uprisings of a kind not foreseen by Marxists, seriously weakened the legitimacy of Marxian views of all kinds. How this will play out in educational administration is not clear. It is

possible that critical theory will become less and less recognizably Marxist. This would make it less sharply distinguishable from progressive reform movements of other kinds and from the liberalism that has traditionally been an anathema for many thinkers of the intellectual left. Movement in such a direction could be facilitated by the philosophical innocence of more than a few critical theorists in education who are attracted mainly to a reformist program rather than to a more complete Marxist position. If this should happen, critical theory would likely become a more diffuse, less uniform view with a less cohesive set of adherents, something already typical for most "schools" of thought. Another possibility, consistent with the history of Marxism, is a breakup into warring factions. This would probably give critical theory the look of a members-only debating society, even less relevant to issues in school administration than it is currently.

As indicated earlier, pragmatism has been a non-subjectivist, non-Marxist, non-positivist philosophical alternative in educational administration. This philosophy has qualities that can make it highly appealing to scholars and practitioners alike. It celebrates science, but is not scientistic, its approach to values stresses the process of moral choice, and its social philosophy emphasizes community, democracy, and individual freedom and growth.

Despite the potential appeal of this perspective, writing in educational administration has been only marginally devoted to the consideration of broad philosophical alternatives. The turn toward philosophy in the field that occurred in recent years (Willower, 1988) reflected debates over specific epistemological and ethical questions more than it did a search for a guiding view of one kind or another. Subjectivists and critical theorists cast many of their arguments in metatheoretical and ideological modes. As these views decline, discourse at those levels might decline as well. This would likely channel more energies into the building of explanatory theory and empirical studies.

One of the clearer trends in the field is methodological, toward field studies. Such studies have, of course, a variety of purposes. As Corbin and Strauss (1990) note, this research can "aim at producing rich descriptions, ethnographic fact-finding accounts, narratives that yield *verstehen*, theoretical analyses of particular phenomena, systematic theory, or politically intended consciousness-raising documents" (pp. 3-4). Diverse purposes suggest some differences in evaluative criteria, but the credibility of field research is likely to be judged largely in terms of what constitutes "good science" in qualitative inquiry (see Corbin & Strauss, 1990). As such studies become more and more routine, greater attention will probably be given to their limitations and efforts made to develop regimens that contribute to their legitimacy in scientific terms. The "politically intended" documents that Corbin and Strauss referred to will, no doubt, continue to be produced, but may well be seen largely as reflections of their authors' convictions. If they wish to avoid such judgments, critical ethnographers (see Anderson, 1989) and others interested in advancing political agendas will have to blend openness about their predilections with attention to empirical grounding, as Willis (1977) did in his study of a group of English high school boys. The various field approaches, including less ambitious ones like case studies and even what might be thought of as vignettes, as well as routines employed within field research such as interviewing, recording of descriptions, document analysis, and interpretive classification will all be fair game for critical examination and emendation. Efforts to strengthen the scientific credibility of qualitative works will not mean that quantitative methods will be disregarded. They are alive and well and, abetted by available and new computer technologies, can be expected to continue to thrive. Perhaps disputes about which methods are best will give way to efforts to improve methods in use, of whatever variety.

The future in educational administration will probably be characterized by theoretical and methodological eclecticism. Even as the influence of ideological critique fades, considerable tolerance will no doubt be displayed to scholars who remain devoted

primarily to such pursuits. However, ideas of all kinds will continue to be evaluated using logic and reason. The irrational is commonly investigated using rational methods and those who would replace reason with some sort of intuition or ideological faith are caught in the logocentric predicament: They must use logic to criticize logic. Such standards of discourse are widely accepted in the community of scholars as is the practical empiricism referred to earlier. If subjectivism and neo-Marxism were ever a serious threat to such standards, an arguable point, the threat seems to have abated because of both changing times and the enduring need for reasoned communication among scholars.

Science Redux

Having conjectured that logic and empirical cogency will remain the coin of the realm in educational administration, I will argue that scholarship in the field would be served by a deeper appreciation of science as it is (see Willower, 1991). Science is a very human enterprise. Its norms are constructed and sustained by people and its main activities are based on individuals who are curious about how things work, create tentative explanations, and subject them to public assessment. The norms of science differ somewhat in various fields of study. Obviously, they are likely to be most stringent in disciplines where predictions and their testing are more clear cut. They also are tailored to the particular methods employed as exemplified by differences in standards for quantitative and qualitative social science research. However, despite variations in the specifics, norms in science are generally geared to skeptical openmindedness, impersonal criteria of evaluation, and the public communication of results (Zuckerman, 1988).

Scientific inquiry seeks plausible explanation and credible evidence. It can provide no more than that: There are no final truths or closed questions. Science is

self-critical and self-corrective, open to any theory that can marshal the support of logic and evidence, but dogmatically committed to none.

Of course, the human condition has a dark side. People can be biased, self-serving, and manipulative. The norms of science are intended to counter such tendencies and they appear to do a reasonably effective job. It is quite clear that science works, in sharp contrast with alternatives such as authority, intuition, or faith. Airplanes fly, organs can be transplanted, and many administrator, teacher, and student attitudes and behaviors in school settings are remarkably predictable. That science and its uses are chancy, at best matters of probability, and will often end in failure, simply shows the limitations that attend all efforts to gain knowledge, or to use Dewey's (1938) term, warranted assertibility.

I believe that scholars in educational administration need to recapture the sense of excitement and adventure inherent in active engagement in inquiry. The science bashing of the past several decades was based largely on stereotypes and showed little or no understanding of inquiry as it practiced; however, it probably diminished the intellectual resources devoted to explanatory theory and research, an unfortunate occurrence in a field with an already comparatively weak research culture.

Science, Values and Practice

A crucial problem in views that are anti-science is that they cut off values and practice, which are at the core of a field like educational administration, from their empirical and explanatory connections, connections that are essential to wise choice. Values in administration are expressed in moral choices made between competing goods, or too often, the lesser of evils. Practice is conducted through decisions about current problems and preferred futures.

Values and practice are deeply intertwined. Both need science if they are to proceed intelligently. Moral choices between clear cut goods and evils are easy to make.

It is the effort to come to ethically justifiable decisions in the face of closely competing goods in complex situations that requires the reflective examination of various courses of action and their possible consequences. In this connection, the subject matter of the social sciences can furnish conceptual frameworks and estimates of likely effects. This is admittedly a rough and uncertain process, but it is what reflective administration is about (for elaboration see Willower, 1991). The main point is that values and practice are facilitated and improved if they are sustained by an array of scientific concepts and theories. Such subject matter can help administrators understand and deal wisely with difficult concrete problems. Indeed, without it they are handicapped and less likely to attain just and desirable outcomes.

Thus, a revitalization of inquiry in educational administration would serve both values and practice. To separate science from school life is a serious error because the subject matter of social science used reflectively by a savvy administrator can drive school improvement and enhance student learning. The reflective use of such subject matter is also tied to inquiry since the scientific or reflective temper provides procedural connections between the individual and thoughtful practice (see Dewey, 1922). I believe that a revitalized science, realistically understood in terms of both its great strengths and its limits and seen in relationship to values and practice, could lead to a period of renewal in educational administration. If this revitalization were to define the post positivist era in the field, educational administration could move from a time of disputation, much of which had little affect on our understanding of schools and education, to a time of genuine progress.

Footnote

1. This paper draws, in part, on my 1991 monograph published by NCPEA and my 1992 entry for the Encyclopedia of Educational Research, both referenced below.

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